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STANDARD EXAMINATIONS FOR NON-COLLEGE PUPILS¹

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The desire for standard examinations for girls who are not going up to college is the outcome of experience on the part of the private schools for girls in Boston. The girls who do go up for college examination have proved that there is a stimulus and an inspiration in the prospect of being examined by a body outside of their own school boards, and the girls who have not done that have in many cases expressed a desire for a definite goal and aim toward which they might work. Some of our girls have tried to achieve this goal by taking the college entrance examinations, even although they were not going to college; but to the schools that has not been satisfactory, because of the nature of the college entrance requirements. If a girl is going to college afterward, she can fill in any deficiencies that the college entrance requirements leave; but if school is to be the end of her regular mental training, we are not satisfied with the college entrance examinations. The restrictions in actual subject-matter are considerable; the restrictions in the distribution and proportion of the various subjects are more considerable, and the restrictions in method perhaps more considerable still. Methods imposed or demanded by the college requirements are frequently such as we should not choose for the benefit of our classes, and the general attitude toward a subject may be unfavorably affected by college examination requirements.

It is sometimes suggested that, for the sake of a definite goal, each school shall offer diplomas based on examinations of its own setting, which shall meet the needs of non-college girls. In the way of that, however, there are several difficulties. There is a zest and an interest in the examination and the test set by a body without our own walls, which is not felt by the girls when the examination is set by us within the walls. In the second place, no teacher wants to brand a dull, but persevering, faithful girl, on graduation day, if her steady pace has not brought her up to a creditable rank on the diploma requirements; if the examinations are set by the remoter body, the brand is not so conspicuous. In the third place, the winning of college entrance from the board, which is a national board,

¹ Read before the New England Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools, October, 1906.

gives a stand in the face of the whole country; but the school, which can have only a local reputation, can have only a local prestige for its examination and its diploma. Those reasons withhold various schools from granting diplomas. The need for an outside examining board therefore remains.

We have felt that any board which should be really authoritative in its decisions must be connected with the leading institutions of the country. The College Entrance Examination Board is such a board, and we thought, therefore, of applying to it to set examinations which the pupils might take, and which might be the basis of diplomas given by the schools or given by the board. If the board, however, was to do this, the scope of its work would be enlarged. That would mean an addition to the very great burden which every teacher knows the college board must already carry. It would also entail expense.

It was necessary, therefore, to know whether a large body of girls and boys, but girls primarily, would want to take these examinations, before we could present such a matter to the board. We, therefore, prepared a circular letter to preparatory schools, setting forth the modifications which we desired in the college examinations. That letter was sent to about twenty-five representative schools—private schools, chiefly for girls—in the East, in each case with a personal note, the gist of which was this: “Would you like to join in such a letter, which is practically a petition addressed to the college board?” Text of the letter:

As there are always among our pupils a number of girls who wish to study for examinations, but do not wish to go to college, and as the needs of these girls cannot well be met by the college entrance examinations, it seems to us highly desirable that another set of standard examinations should be established somewhat different in scope, method, and aim from those now held. We, therefore, invite your consideration and criticism of the following suggestions:

1. The papers for these new examinations might be made out by a committee of headmasters and retired teachers from secondary schools for girls, or by the present College Entrance Examination Board.
2. The examination papers should be distributed among the schools desiring them, to be administered in their own buildings at the hours stated.
3. The aim of these examinations should be to test the training, intelligence, and general information of the candidates, and all requirements which necessitate uniformity of preparation should be ruled out. For instance:

a) All passages for translation into English should be at sight, and there should be no translation into a foreign language except on the elementary papers; while free composition and similar tests should be given a place on the more advanced modern-language papers.

b) The examinations in English composition and in English literature should be quite distinct, no reading—except possibly one book, changed each year—being required in preparation for the former.

c) Great freedom of choice should be offered on the history, geography, and literature papers, in order to do away with any necessity for cramming.

d) Practical rather than mathematical problems should be given on the physics and astronomy papers, and qualitative work only in chemistry.

e) Above all, special sequence of subjects should be required, and no time limit should be imposed in regard to the number of years among which a candidate may divide her examinations.

4. The committee would issue two diplomas, one for work of the college preparatory grade, and one for more advanced work, to students who pass with *merit* a certain number of examinations in each grade, say in five minor and four major, and in three advanced subjects.

The replies expressed much interest in anything which should add to the interest of girls not going up for college examinations.

Inquiry was then made of members of the College Entrance Examination Board to see whether the body could consider any such proposition, as that of enlarged examinations, and we were told that the body could not add to its present duties; that it could not consider at all the granting of anything like a diploma; that they took no part in determining the results of their examinations, but simply gave the examinations and marked the papers. It seemed, therefore, that we certainly could not have a new set of papers or a diploma which should be given by the College Entrance Examination Board.

Yet the answers pointed to a very general feeling among the schools which were addressed that the college entrance requirements might be modified with benefit to the pupils; and it seemed to us, as we further considered the suggestions in our letter, that they were such as might meet with favor among many schools. We have wanted, therefore, to know whether this body would be interested in any sort of approach to the colleges for a modification of their entrance requirements, or the formation of a board which should take in hand the giving of examinations of a broader scope.

If such a board were formed, it is very hard to suppose that it would fail eventually to be merged with the College Entrance Examination Board. Why should there be two boards, when with a modification of the college entrance requirements we could get what we need for college and non-college girls alike? It would be possible, if the College Entrance Examination Board would give these modified examinations and somewhat enlarge the scope, for any school to grant a diploma on the basis of examinations set by the College Entrance Board. They would simply choose the sub-

jects which they considered of greatest disciplinary value, and subjects which they considered of greatest culture value, make their own proportion between the two, and decide what must be passed for a diploma. The diploma might be based on certain of the College Entrance Board's examinations, plus certain other examinations set by the given school. This would admit of much elasticity.

We feel so much certain hamperings in our work with the college preparatory girls that we are very desirous, for their sakes as well as for the larger body of girls who do not go to college, that a modification should be brought about in the college entrance requirements.

I am authorized to say that if this body should be interested to approach the colleges for a modification of the college requirements, the expense entailed by the large correspondence that would be needed among the schools, and the expense entailed by the College Entrance Examination Board for the initiation of work of enlarged scope, would be met, so that expense need not be considered as an obstacle.

I beg, in closing, to express our cordial sympathy with the College Entrance Examination Board in their difficult work, and our sense that in their examinations already, more than in those of the individual colleges, we feel the touch of breadth.